



Department of Communication Studies University of Nebraska-Lincoln

DOCTORAL STUDENT HANDBOOK

Revised January 2017

PLEASE NOTE CHANGES HIGHLIGHTED IN YELLOW. REVISED DOCUMENTS AVAILABLE AT THE END OF THE HANDBOOK

This handbook is meant as a *supplement* to and not a replacement for the *UNL Graduate Studies Bulletin*. Students should be familiar with the guidelines in that document as these govern your work and conduct here at UNL. The UNL Graduate Studies Bulletin and the Graduate Studies website (www.unl.edu/gradstudies) will provide greater detail on university-level policies that affect a student's program and progress toward degree. Please read these sources carefully and often (and they will often be more up-to-date and reflect recent changes). Each individual student is responsible for being familiar with, and meeting, the university and departmental requirements, paperwork, and deadlines. Students are urged to keep copies of all forms submitted and correspondence received.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE PROGRAM

- I.A Summary of Forms and Program Personnel
- I.B Student Status and Time Requirements
- I.C Plan of Study

II. APPOINTING AN ADVISOR, COMMITTEE, AND AREA(S) OF CONCENTRATION

- II.A Appointing an Advisor and Supervisory Committee
- II.B Expectations of Faculty and Students

III. COURSEWORK AND PROGRAM OF STUDY

- III.A The Program of Study
- III.B. Process for Completing the Program of Study

IV. COMPREHENSIVE EXAMS, DISSERTATION PRE-PROPOSAL, ORAL EXAM, & CANDIDACY

- IV.A Dissertation Pre-proposal
- IV.B Written Comprehensive Exam Process
- IV.C Oral Examination Process
- IV.D Admission to Candidacy

V. RESEARCH DISSERTATION AND COMPLETION

- V.A Dissertation Prospectus and Dissertation Research
- V.B Preparing for Final Oral Defense of Dissertation
- V.C Final Oral Examination Meeting
- V.D Finishing Up: Editing and Depositing the Dissertation
- V.E ABD as an Off-Campus Student
- Annual Report on Progress Toward Degree

VI. PROGRESS REPORTS AND FUNDING

- VI.A Annual Report on Progress Toward Degree
- VI.B Second Year Review and 4th Year Funding
- VI.C Fellowships and Additional Funding

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE PROGRAM

I.A SUMMARY OF FORMS AND PROGRAM PERSONNEL

Forms Required by the Office of Graduate Studies

- Appointment of the Supervisory Committee
- Program of Studies for the Doctoral Degree
- Application for Admission to Candidacy
- Application for Degree
- Application for Final Oral Examination or Waiver
- Final Packet for Doctoral Students

Forms are located online at <https://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/degrees/doctoral>. This website also provides important information about the timeline of your program.

University and Departmental Personnel

Department Personnel

- Director of Graduate Studies (DGS): Responsible for assisting students and faculty on issues surrounding graduate study; initial advisor to all students.
- Graduate Committee: Departmental committee oversees all issues of graduate program
- Doctoral Advisor: Responsible for mentoring and supervising coursework, independent research, and completion of dissertation.
- Supervisory Committee: Advisor and three additional graduate faculty members supervising the program of study. Must have two members from the department and a member from outside the department.
- Examining Committee: Supervisory Committee and any other faculty who write questions for the comprehensive exams
- Reading Committee: Two Supervisory Committee members who read the dissertation after it is approved by advisor
- Communication Studies Administrative Assistant: Coordinates graduate student record-keeping and GTA paperwork, payroll

Office of Graduate Studies Personnel

- Doctoral Program Specialist: Coordinates all doctoral requirements and paperwork in Graduate Studies for all doctoral students on campus.
- Fellowships/Assistantships Specialist: Handles financial matters for graduate students.

I.B STUDENT STATUS AND TIME REQUIREMENTS

Full-time status

To be considered full-time, students must be enrolled for at least 9 credit hours in both the fall and spring semesters and for at least 3 credit hours during one summer session (GTAs must be registered full-time). Students should make all registration decisions with a faculty member. Until an advisor is chosen, the Director of Graduate Studies will advise on courses and/or appropriate faculty members to consult.

Credit limit

For students who are employed or hold a teaching or research assistantship that is not thesis related, the maximum registration is 12 credit hours. For current tuition and registration fees, contact the Office of Graduate Studies.

Employment

Students on full Graduate Teaching Assistantships *may not hold any other employment during the academic year.*

Residency and Time Requirements

The residency requirement for the Ph.D. is 27 hours of graduate work in a consecutive 18-month period or less. Not more than 9 hours total credits taken during the summer session may apply toward the residency requirement. The residency requirement is part of the approved Program of Study. See *Graduate Studies Bulletin* for more complete information.

A minimum of three full years of graduate study is normally required to complete the Ph.D. The maximum time limit on granting the Ph.D is eight years from the time of filing the Program of Study in the Graduate Studies Office. Students must maintain active progress toward the degree to remain in the program. The Graduate Faculty reviews all students annually and graduate students may be put on probation or dismissed from the program if adequate progress toward degree completion is not made.

Please note that the Office of Financial Aid works independently from the department and Office of Graduate Studies in terms of specific federal policies related to eligibility and status.

I.C PLAN OF STUDY

Our program is designed so that full-time students will complete the doctoral degree within three to four years. Full-time students normally complete coursework and take comprehensive exams/orals/dissertation pre-proposal during fall of the third year, advancing to doctoral candidacy (“all but dissertation,” or ABD). Students are expected to complete a full dissertation proposal and meet with their Supervisory Committee soon thereafter, and normally within the following semester.

Stages of Doctoral Program

Work toward our Ph.D. consists of four stages: (1) coursework and preparing the Program of Study, (2) written comprehensive and oral examination, (3) dissertation proposal, and oral examination, and (4) dissertation research, writing, and final oral examination. Normally a student’s plan of study contains a *minimum* of 90 hours. In consultation with the advisor and Supervisory Committee, the hours are distributed in the following manner:

1. 30 credits **maximum** transferred from Master’s degree
2. 45 credits **minimum** of coursework past Master’s degree consisting of:
 - (a) 12 credits **minimum** of Communication Studies courses in a primary area
 - (b) 9 credits **minimum** of Communication Studies courses in a secondary area. These can be courses from one department area (e.g., Organizational Communication) or courses from multiple areas representing a cohesive course of study. **Please note that the minimum courses in a secondary area are no longer required. Although we strongly encourage students to take courses in Communication Studies, courses in other departments may also be required.**
 - (c) 15 credits **minimum** of research methods. Students may use transferred courses from their MA program (No. 1 above) to fulfill this research methods requirement. These courses will **not** count toward the 45 post-MA credits required for the degree. Therefore, if students use transferred courses from their MA program to fulfill the research requirement, they will have to complete additional courses to reach the 45 credit hour requirement..
 - (d) Courses within and outside of Communication Studies to establish primary specialization
3. 12 credits **minimum** of dissertation credits

Note: Completing 1-3 above results in 87 credit hours. The additional 3 credit hours needed to fulfill the 90 credit hour requirement can be completed as additional dissertation credits or with additional coursework. While we recommend the Preparing Future Faculty Program (PFF, 3 credits), it will not count in the first 45 credits of coursework.

Please speak with your advisor or the Director of Graduate Studies about requirements for minors/specializations.

The following schedule enables a full-time student to complete the Ph.D. in three to four years, including summer coursework, research on projects, and making progress toward dissertation. Refer to subsequent sections for detailed information on appointing committees, program of study, comprehensive exams, and completing a dissertation.

1st Semester

- Take courses from and become acquainted with departmental faculty.
- Meet with advisor, other faculty members, or the Director of Graduate Studies to discuss areas of concentration, research tool needs, and spring/summer registration.

2nd Semester

- Ask a Graduate Faculty Member to serve as advisor (normally toward end of first semester or early in the second semester).
- Work on getting to know faculty outside of department who might serve on Supervisory Committee and appoint a Supervisory Committee in consultation with advisor.
- Draft Program of Study in consultation with advisor and Supervisory Committee. Complete this process in second semester if possible and no later than 4th week of third semester.
- File Program of Study in Graduate Studies

3rd Semester

Complete coursework.

4th Semester

- Progress made on dissertation pre-proposal this semester and summer.
- Students meet with and Supervisory Committee to develop plan for Comprehensive examinations.
- Meet with Examining Committee members for direction for studying for exams.

5th Semester

- Complete coursework, if necessary.
- Complete written and oral comprehensive exams and defend dissertation pre-proposal.
- Complete full dissertation prospectus and hold proposal meeting with Supervisory Committee (no later than 6th semester)

6th Semester +

Dissertation research and oral defense when the work is completed.

Continuation in the Ph.D. Program

A cumulative grade point average of 3.5 is required for continuation of a Graduate Teaching Assistantship (GTA). A cumulative grade point average of 3.0 or higher is expected for continuation in the degree program for all other students. Graduate course grading is different from undergraduate grading, and a "C" grade is considered unacceptable. In some courses, "C" grades cannot be counted toward degree. See the section on Scholastic Grade requirements in the *Graduate Studies Bulletin* for complete information on grades and required minimum grades in different levels of graduate courses.

Academic Progress and Probation

Students who are struggling for any reason are encouraged to meet with their advisor, Director of Graduate Studies or Department Chair to see assistance and talk about strategies for succeeding in the program. All of us want to help.

If a student earns a less than acceptable grade in a course, if a student's overall GPA does not meet the minimum expected, or if a student is not making sufficient progress toward degree completion, the Graduate Committee will address the issue. The Graduate Committee will place the student on Academic Probation, and will lay out criteria for prompt removal of probation and continuing in the program, or may recommend dismissal from the program. Students placed on probation will receive a letter specifying the committee's decision and steps for returning to good standing.

Removal of Provisional Status

For students who were admitted to the department's graduate program on Provisional Status, after the requirements have been completed, schedule a meeting with the Director of Graduate Studies. She or he will recommend admittance with Full Graduate Standing and will write a letter to Graduate Studies to

recommend removal of provisional status. The Certificate of Admission will have the conditions of the admission status. This memo removing Provisional Status must be submitted before filing the Program of Studies form.

Annual Check-up Meeting

The faculty meets each spring to review the graduate program and the progress of each student in the program. Advisors should meet with their students after the meeting to discuss their progress and goals. Students may initiate this conversation with their advisors as well. Students will also complete a formal review at the end of the 2nd year (4th semester) as part of the 4th year funding process. More information can be found in the discussion on 4th year funding. Consistent progress and good performance is necessary to remain in good standing in the program.

Managing Problems

If a student finds himself/herself struggling in the program academically, or with handling the demands of the degree program, teaching, time management, etc., they are strongly encouraged to meet with their advisor, the Director of Graduate Studies, Department Chair, or another faculty member. It is advisable to do this as early as possible. Our ultimate goal is the success of each student.

II. APPOINTING AN ADVISOR, COMMITTEE, AND AREA(S) OF CONCENTRATION

II.A APPOINTING AN ADVISOR AND SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE

Toward the end of the first semester or early in the second semester, students request a Graduate Faculty Member in the Department of Communication Studies to work with them as their advisor and together they put together a Supervisory Committee.

Appointing the Advisor

Faculty members make advising decisions based on a number of factors, including the student's area of interest, research methodology, and current number of advisees. See the UNL "Guidelines for Good Practice in Graduate Education" document for a description of the role of the faculty advisor (<http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current>). Students and/or advisors may make changes in this advising agreement as time goes on, for example, as a student's interest and focus have changed. Schedule a meeting with a potential advisor to talk over your goals and preferences. If an advisor cannot serve, s/he will likely have a suggestion for a replacement. For assistance, see the Director of Graduate Studies.

Students and advisors are an important partnership. Open lines of communication between them are essential. Students should discuss expectations and processes with their advisor and ask how the advisor would like to be kept abreast of the student's progress. The Director of Graduate Studies and Department Chair can also serve as a resource to the student when needed. While some advisors or committee members may choose to work with students over breaks and summers, this should not be an expectation on the part of the student.

Once a student selects an advisor, they should inform the Department Administrative Assistant and Director of Graduate Studies.

The Supervisory Committee

Together, the student and advisor discuss the members of the student's Supervisory Committee. The duties of the Supervisory Committee include guiding the student in planning a Program of Study, selecting an Examining Committee for comprehensive exams, and planning and submitting a satisfactory dissertation. Once students and advisors have identified potential Supervisory Committee members, the student should talk with each person and determine his or her willingness to participate.

The Supervisory Committee must consist of four Graduate Faculty Members: the advisor, two Graduate Faculty Members from the Department of Communication Studies, and one Graduate Faculty Member from an outside department (although other possibilities exist). Faculty from other universities can serve on a courtesy appointment in addition to the UNL faculty. Two members of the Supervisory Committee will later be designated as members of the Dissertation Reading Committee (usually the two members from inside the department) and given responsibility for reviewing the dissertation prior to the final oral defense.

The Supervisory Committee must be appointed while students still have more than 45 hours remaining to be taken. Once the Supervisory Committee has been appointed, complete the **Appointment of the Supervisory Committee** form (download from graduate studies website) and file with the Office of Graduate Studies. Provide a copy of this form along with a list of committee members to the department's administrative assistant. **REFERENCE PROCESS FOR PROGRAM OF STUDY AT END OF HANDBOOK.**

Changing the Supervisory Committee

Changes may be made in the committee, as a student's interest and foci change. Students should initiate a discussion with their advisor and then the faculty member before a change is made. While this might seem uncomfortable for some students, remember that faculty members expect that students may make committee changes as their studies progress. Students should feel free to discuss these issues with the Director of Graduate Studies. Committee changes should be filed immediately via an email memo from your advisor to Graduate Studies. Inform the Department Administrative Assistant and Director of Graduate Studies of changes in your committee.

II.B EXPECTATIONS OF FACULTY AND STUDENTS

The UNL "Guidelines for Good Practice in Graduate Education" document does an excellent job of describing the outlook on graduate studies we practice at UNL. You may download the document from Graduate Studies website at:

<http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/GuidelinesForGoodPracticeInGradEducation.pdf>

The document states, "A primary purpose of graduate education at the University of Nebraska is to instill in each student an understanding of and capacity for scholarship, independent judgment, academic rigor, and intellectual honesty" (p. 1). The document provides clear guidelines for conduct for both graduate students and faculty members that we take seriously. Both faculty members and graduate students are expected to "Conduct themselves in a mature, ethical, and civil manner in all interactions with faculty and staff in accordance with the accepted standards of the discipline and University of Nebraska policies governing discrimination and harassment" (p. 2). Students should read this document carefully. If students have any questions or concerns about any of these issues, they are encouraged to see their advisor, Director of Graduate Studies, or Department Chair.

III. COURSEWORK AND PROGRAM OF STUDY

III.A THE PROGRAM OF STUDY

A student, his or her advisor, and Supervisory Committee together develop a Program of Study. The Program of Study is a personalized document that defines the content of coursework and study, and a schedule for completion of doctoral work. This is a very important and helpful planning process for students, their advisors and committees as well. Students will come away from the process with a plan to complete their degree in a timely and focused manner.

The Supervisory Committee is not obligated to accept credits beyond the Masters degree, which were completed prior to its appointment. This is one important reason for appointing the committee and filing the Program of Study as early as feasible. The Program of Study should be completed within 9-15 hours of coursework beyond the Masters degree (at least half of the total program of courses and dissertation research must remain to be completed after the submission of the Program of Study). *For full-time students, the faculty recommends submission at the end of the second semester or at the very latest, the beginning of the third semester.*

Criteria for designing and reviewing the Program of Study

(1) To reflect the interests and goals of the student. The Program of Study should provide coursework to meet these needs, and envision a comprehensive examination, which certifies that the student has acquired the knowledge commensurate with these needs and interests; (2) To acquire the specialized knowledge (content and research methods) necessary to successfully complete an independent research dissertation, and the depth of knowledge characteristic of the holder of a research degree; (3) To develop grounding in Communication Studies sufficient to bring a breadth of knowledge and preparation to the post-doctoral profession. Hours transferred to UNL from another institution will be evaluated for their consistency with these criteria

III.B PROCESS FOR COMPLETING THE PROGRAM OF STUDY

**PLEASE REFERENCE PROCESS FOR PROGRAM OF STUDY GUIDE
AT THE END OF THE HANDBOOK FOR UPDATED INFORMATION**

Changes to Program of Study

Students' areas of interest may change during the course of the graduate program. In such a case students are encouraged to consult with their advisors. Changes are easily accomplished and do not reflect any weakness on the part of the student, the advisor, or the Supervisory Committee. The rationale for requested alterations is ultimately to strengthen a student's program.

Changes must be approved by the Supervisory Committee members. Any changes from the Program of Study should be submitted by the advisor in writing (via email) to the Doctoral Program Specialist in Graduate Studies. All changes must be made and filed before taking comprehensive exams.

Dissertation Credits (COMM 999)

Students must register for the number of credits listed on the program of study (the UNL minimum is 12 credits). Students on GTA lines may sign up for these credits during their program and they come out of the total credits they may take each semester. For GTAs, these credits may also come from the six covered credits GTAs receive for summer classes. Students may also sign up for dissertation credits when

the coursework is done and they are still in residence. However students do it, plan ahead and make sure to have taken the minimum number of dissertation credits that the program of study indicates by the semester of graduation.

IV. COMPREHENSIVE EXAMS, DISSERTATION PRE-PROPOSAL, ORAL EXAM, & CANDIDACY

**PLEASE REFERENCE NEW COMPREHENSIVE EXAM GUIDELINES
AVAILABLE AT THE END OF THE HANDBOOK**

ADMISSION TO CANDIDACY

Successful completion of the comprehensive written exams and orals means the student is advanced to Candidacy (what is commonly known as “all but dissertation” ABD). Congratulations!

Following the successful completion of the oral exam meeting, the student should immediately submit the signed **Application for Admission to Candidacy for Doctoral Degree** to Graduate Studies.

Students are encouraged to complete and orally defend a full dissertation prospectus (generally the first chapters) as quickly as possible, generally within 2-4 months of the oral exam over the pre-proposal.

Maintaining Registration

Following admission to Candidacy a graduate student must register for one credit hour during *each* academic year semester (fall and spring) until they receive their degree. It is very important to maintain enrollment each semester one is ABD.

The in-absentia resident tuition rate is a benefit for doctoral candidates who are paying their own tuition. Because we require candidates to be registered each academic semester until they graduate, they are eligible to pay resident tuition rates for one credit hour each academic semester when this registration is in excess of the hours on their program of studies. Students, who were classified as Residents for tuition purposes while here on campus, will maintain Resident status on future billings even when they move away from campus. Students must file an in-absentia form each semester and may obtain these forms from UNL Graduate Studies.

An ABD graduate student receiving financial aid is eligible for fulltime status when they have been admitted to formal doctoral candidacy (this after passing comprehensive exams and orals), registered for at least one credit hour for the period stated, and **not** working more than 20 hour per week. This form is term specific so it must be filed for each enrollment period. Students must file a Full-time status form each semester and may obtain these forms from the Communication Studies main office or Graduate Studies.

Note: See sections on “Life as an All but Dissertation (ABD) student” and “Annual Report on Progress Toward Degree” later in this manual.

V. RESEARCH DISSERTATION AND COMPLETION

V.A DISSERTATION PROSPECTUS AND DISSERTATION RESEARCH

After the pre-proposal is approved at the comprehensive oral exam, the student develops the full dissertation prospectus for the dissertation research. Students are encouraged to complete and orally defend a prospectus as quickly as possible, generally within 2-4 months of oral exam over the pre-proposal.

The prospectus document is a formal presentation of and justification for the dissertation research, and a detailed plan for completion of the study (for most projects, this constitutes the first chapters of the dissertation). Students should work with their advisors on the form and scope of the prospectus.

Prospectus Meeting

Once the prospectus is completed by the student and approved by their advisor, the student distributes it to the Supervisory Committee and schedules a prospectus meeting. Committee members should be allowed a minimum of two weeks to read the prospectus. Students should schedule the meeting date, time, and room.

At this two-hour meeting, the student and the Supervisory Committee discuss the proposed project. Students should not begin research or data collection until after receiving Supervisory Committee approval. If the advisor and student desire, they may note changes to be made in writing and pass these by the Supervisory Committee.

Once the student receives Supervisory Committee approval, he/she begins formal research and the preparation of the dissertation text. Agreement should be reached between the student, advisor, and Supervisory Committee regarding the frequency and manner in which the Supervisory Committee will be involved in the dissertation process. Some advisors prefer to approve dissertations chapter by chapter, most prefer to wait until the dissertation is substantially completed.

Advisors should communicate with Supervisory Committees and keep them abreast of the student's progress, especially as the student nears completion and submitting work to the committee. *During the entire dissertation process, students should not send any materials to the Supervisory Committee without knowledge and approval of their advisor.*

Use of Human Subjects

If the dissertation research involves the use of human participants, students will need to file the appropriate forms with the university's Institutional Review Board, per departmental and university procedures, as detailed on the UNL Research Compliance website. All researchers must complete an online IRB training prior to filing these forms.

Materials and Expenses

Students are responsible for the cost of *all* materials for dissertation research (e.g., library costs, computer use, analysis, software, audio or videotapes), all copying expenses, express mailing, and all travel expenses. Departmental staff members are not available for typing, editing, proofing, or copying student dissertations, nor are they responsible for distributing paperwork or forms.

Style Manual

Dissertations should conform very carefully to the style sheet as directed by the advisor (usually APA or MLA). Students should also consult the UNL “Guidebook for Preparing a Thesis or Dissertation” available on the Grad Studies website.

V.B PREPARING FOR FINAL ORAL DEFENSE OF DISSERTATION

Check the Graduate Studies Website for a summary of the forms and deadlines as these may change: <https://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/degrees/doctoral>

Students must apply for graduation early in the semester they will graduate. Check with the advisor before filing this form. If one ends up delaying graduation for any reason, contact the Director of Graduate Studies and the Graduate Studies Doctoral Program Specialist immediately.

Once the dissertation is written and approved by the student's advisor, the full dissertation goes to the Reading Committee, who need a minimum of two weeks to read the dissertation. Once they approve the dissertation for defense, the student is eligible to apply for the final oral examination. The student should prepare the form **Application for Final Oral Examination or Waiver of Examination for Doctoral Degree** (available on Graduate Studies website). The form must be typed and requires signatures of various committee members.

The form must be filed at least three weeks prior to the scheduled final oral exam (dissertation defense). As the student needs to leave two weeks for the readers to read the dissertation, the dissertation needs to go to the readers no less than **five weeks** before the anticipated defense date.

If not in residence at UNL to file the paperwork in person, students must arrange to have a colleague collect and deliver the paperwork for them.

The final oral should be scheduled at a time when at least three members of the committee, and preferably all, including the advisor, can attend. The final oral may be waived if there is unanimous consent of all members of the supervisory committee (although this is extremely rare). If the examination is to be waived, all members of the committee must sign the form and a reason for the waiver must be included on the form.

The signed **Application for Final Oral Examination or Waiver of Examination for Doctoral Degree** form must also include the time and date of the final oral exam meeting (schedule two hours). Do not schedule the meeting without advisor approval.

Be sure to schedule Oldfather 438 (or ask the Communication Studies administrative assistant to help you find an alternative room) for two hours for the defense meeting.

The Graduate Studies Doctoral Program Specialist will also provide the instructions on downloading and preparing the **Final Examination Form** that the committee signs at the completion of the final oral meeting. Students should reference the “Guidebook for Preparing a Thesis or Dissertation” (download from Graduate Studies website) and the Graduate Bulletin for details. Advisors and the Director of Graduate Studies can also answer questions about this process.

No more than two weeks before the final oral examination, a complete copy of the dissertation (everything except acknowledgements) is distributed to all Supervisory Committee members. Comments made by the Reading Committee, if any, should have been addressed in this final document.

V.C FINAL ORAL EXAMINATION MEETING

The final oral examination (final defense of the dissertation) is conducted by the Supervisory Committee. The meeting may involve a 10-20 minute oral presentation of the dissertation findings open to all department and community members (at the discretion of advisor and student). The advisor will issue an invitation for others to attend. Once the guests depart, the Supervisory Committee meets with the candidate and the committee may ask questions about of the dissertation, the candidate's general knowledge, as well as questions designed to test judgment and critical powers. The student and advisor take detailed notes during the meeting.

The final oral for the Ph.D. will not be scheduled unless the chairperson of the Supervisory Committee (advisor) and at least two other members of the committee are available for the examination. Exceptions may be made only by permission of the Dean of Graduate Studies.

At the end of this meeting, the Supervisory Committee renders a final judgment and signs the Report on Doctoral Degree. Students should bring the following to the final oral defense:

- (1) **Report on Completion of the Doctoral Degree** (see Grad Studies website)
- (2) **Title Page (Signature Pages)** for dissertation

Deficiencies

In the event a student does not pass the final oral examination, the Supervisory Committee must file a report with the Office of Graduate Studies and indicate what the student must do before taking another examination. Another examination may not be held during the same semester of the original exam.

V.D FINISHING UP: EDITING AND DEPOSITING THE DISSERTATION

After the final oral examination, the student makes all changes stipulated by the Supervisory Committee. Students should give the document one final proofread as this copy is widely available and will be associated with the student forever! The advisor and/or whole committee may ask to see the final document before deposit.

Follow instructions carefully from the Doctoral Program Specialist and Graduate Studies website on how to submit the dissertation. Please remember that the Doctoral Program Specialist is handling all of the doctoral students at UNL (any many are finishing dissertations at the same time). Thus, please pay careful attention to deadlines and what needs to be done.

The Survey of Earned Doctorates

Graduate Studies will also ask graduating students to participate in data collections about the graduate experience. These do not take much time and are important. We would appreciate it very much if you would do so. The Survey of Earned Doctorates is an especially important national survey. Our discipline obtains valuable information on our graduates in this survey and it is a way to highlight our excellent doctoral programs and students nationally.

Copies of the Dissertation

In our departmental tradition, students present one bound copy of the dissertation to their advisor and a second bound copy to the Communication Studies office for deposit in the department library. Most

students offer Supervisory Committee members copies of the dissertation as well (most often paper-bound copies or electronic copies).

Publishing Dissertation or Thesis Work/Publishing with the Advisor

One question students have after they complete their thesis or dissertation is whether their work is a good candidate for a conference paper(s) and/or publishable? Rarely is a document ready as is; most will take cutting and refining, sometimes a significantly, especially for publication. The best source of information will likely be the advisor of the project. Talk over these issues with the advisor while the project is in process (most advisors are thinking ahead about this as they help design the results chapters).

A second question many students have concerns whether the advisor should be a co-author on some or all of the work that comes from the thesis or dissertation. It is important to initiate a discussion with your advisor about this. Whether the advisor is a co-author or not, do make sure to acknowledge the advisor and degree-granting university in all manuscripts coming from the thesis or dissertation.

V.E ABD AS AN OFF-CAMPUS STUDENT

It is not easy to be an ABD student, especially if one takes full-time employment away from campus. Students are urged to complete their degree before leaving campus if possible or to finish within the first year of departure. After leaving campus there are many of obstacles that can come into play, especially the substantial demands of a new job and location. In addition, committee members or advisors may depart, retire, and they take on other responsibilities and additional students.

Students are encouraged to establish a regular schedule and means to check in with the advisor.

Please make sure that the advisor and the department have a current email and address.

VI. PROGRESS REPORTS AND FUNDING

VIA ANNUAL REPORT ON PROGRESS TOWARD DEGREE

The faculty will review the progress of all students at a meeting in spring and will provide feedback to students concerning their progress. Advisors and students should meet shortly after this meeting to discuss their progress in the program. The Director of Graduate Studies will meet with students who have not identified an advisor and will also draft letters to ABD students beyond their 4th year. The Graduate Committee and faculty in our department want each of our students to complete the degree and we are committed to making sure this occurs in a timely fashion and in such a way that protects the integrity of our degree. If necessary, the graduate committee in consultation with the advisor may lay out stipulations and benchmarks for maintaining satisfactory progress in the program.

Timeline for Degree Completion

In a policy adopted by UNL Graduate Studies in April 2002, doctoral students have eight years to complete the degree from the date of filing the Program of Study. Extensions from Graduate Studies are extremely unlikely and will only be considered in the most extreme circumstances.

Expectations on Completing the Degree

While students have eight years after filing the Program of Study to complete the degree, this does not guarantee that a student's advisor or committee will remain active for that length of time. *The faculty expects that students will make consistent progress toward degree completion and complete their degree within **three years** of Advancement to Candidacy* (at the completion of the comprehensive exams), and hopefully *much* sooner. Students who do not make sufficient and consistent progress post-candidacy may be dismissed from the program.

If the end of the three-year period passes, students run the risk of losing advisors and committee members due to faculty leaving or retiring, or due to changes in faculty members' obligations. After the initial three-year period passes, the departmental Graduate Committee may stipulate that the student complete additional coursework and/or pass another comprehensive examination before continuing.

Changes in Advisor or Committee membership

When students lose an advisor or committee members during their program or while ABD, they are responsible for finding replacements for those members. The Director of Graduate Studies and the Graduate Committee can help students negotiate this process. Ultimately it is the student's responsibility to obtain and maintain their doctoral committee. The department is unable to guarantee that faculty members who were not on the original supervisory committee will be available to serve as replacement members.

Note: Not all faculty members are available for reading documents or attending meetings during the summer months. Students should plan discuss availability with committee members in the early stages of planning to develop a suitable timeline for completing the dissertation.

VI.B SECOND YEAR REVIEW AND 4TH YEAR FUNDING

Fourth year funding is available to students who are making satisfactory progress toward their degree (e.g., quality work in courses, involvement in individual and/or collaborative research projects, active engagement in department events and activities). During the last faculty meeting of the year, the faculty will complete a **second year review for students**. Students completing their second year are required to turn in an updated vita, a summary of teaching, and a brief statement about their program of research. These documents will be due April 15th (or other date assigned by the DGS) to the DGS and disseminated to the faculty to review prior to the final DGB meeting. Students will be evaluated on: (a) research productivity (e.g., conference presentations, journal submissions, publications), (b) teaching quality, (c) active involvement in department activities (e.g., colloquium), and (d) active involvement in professional activities (e.g. conferences and conventions). If a majority of the faculty believes the student is making satisfactory progress, they will be awarded 4th year funding. If there is a concern about a student, the DGS and the advisor will draft a letter to the student notifying him/her of our concerns. The DGS and the advisor will also outline specific benchmarks for the student to meet by the beginning of Spring semester of the 3rd year if they wish to receive 4th year funding. One of the benchmarks will be successful completion of comprehensive exams.

These students will be required to submit documentation to the Graduate Committee and advisor concerning their progress by January 31st of the 3rd year. The documentation will include (at minimum) an updated vita and a letter addressing the concerns initially raised by the faculty and how the student has addressed these concerns. At this point, the Graduate Committee and advisor will decide if the student should receive 4th year funding and the decision will be reported to the faculty and student.

VI.C FELLOWSHIPS AND ADDITIONAL FUNDING

There are a variety of opportunities for fellowships and additional funding. One primary source for information on this is located on the graduate studies website at:

<http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/funding>

The department also maintains a database of funding opportunities on the department blackboard website. Students should consult their advisor about opportunities and process of applying for fellowships and additional funding.

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES
PROCESS FOR PROGRAM OF STUDY (PHD) 2016-2017

Step 1: Select Advisor (Fall/Spring Year 1)

- a. Student meets with faculty member(s), identifies potential advisors, and discusses options with faculty member(s).
- b. Faculty member agrees to serve as advisor
- c. Student notifies Director of Graduate Studies (via email)

Step 2: Identify Supervisory Committee (Fall/Spring Year 1)

- a. Student and advisor discuss potential supervisory committee members (two internal members and one outside member)
- b. In consultation with advisor, student completes **Program of Study Form** from the Office of Graduate Studies. Completion of the form should be based on the requirements listed at the bottom of this memo and any additional requirements based on specializations (e.g., WGS, Ethnic Studies). When completing the form, please note that the norm is to have the department committee members serve as readers for the dissertation.
<http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/Doctoral-Program.pdf>
- c. Student completes **Purpose Statement**. This 2-3 page statement presents the student's argument for the configuration of courses and areas of specialty s/he is proposing. Prepare this argument with an eye toward organizing and choosing coursework, guiding research and areas of specialty, methodological choices as well as to looking forward to how one will present credentials upon graduation. Advisors should review and approve the statement prior to moving on to the next action.
- d. Student contacts potential supervisory committee members to discuss serving on the committee. The **Program of Study Form** and **Purpose Statement** should be delivered to the committee member along with **Supervisory Committee Approval Form**. These can be electronic or hard copies depending on the preference of the faculty member. Students should set-up a face-to-face meeting to discuss the plan of study if requested. Please allow faculty members at least two weeks to review documents and send approval to advisor.
- e. Advisor collects **Supervisory Committee Approval Forms** and addresses any issues that emerge.

Note: Advisor may opt to schedule a Program of Study committee meeting in lieu of *part d* and *part e*. If this is the case, the **Program of Study Form** and **Purpose Statement** should be provided to potential committee members prior to the meeting.

Step 3. Turn in Appropriate Paperwork (Fall/Spring Year 1)

- a. After receiving approval from committee members about program of study and willingness to serve on the supervisory committee, student completes the **Appointment of Supervisory Committee Form**.
<http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/Doctoral-SupCommittee.pdf>

- b. Hard copies of *signed* **Program of Study Form, Supervisory Committee Form, Supervisory Committee Approval Form, and Purpose Statement** should be sent to the Department Secretary and Advisor. Students should email the Director of Graduate Studies a list of the members of the Supervisory Committee.
- c. Original copies of the **Program of Study Form** and **Supervisory Committee Form** should be submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies.

*At the time of filing the Program of Study, there should be at least 45 hours of coursework to be completed. Although we are able to work with Graduate Studies in special cases, there is no guarantee that a Program of Study will be accepted if this requirement is not met. **Therefore, it is very important that we adhere to this policy.** As such, plan on completing and submitting paperwork by the end of the Spring Semester of Year 1.*

Additional information about Program of Studies (including changes to original documents submitted) can be found at the “Doctoral Degree Milestone” page on the Office of Graduate Studies:

<http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/degrees/doctoral>

PHD COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Degree Requirements (minimum of 90 credits):

1. 30 credits **maximum** transferred from Master’s degree
2. 45 credits **minimum** of coursework past Master’s degree consisting of:
 - (a) 12 credits **minimum** of Communication Studies courses in a primary area
 - (b) 15 credits **minimum** of research methods. Students may use transferred courses from their MA program (No. 1 above) to fulfill this research methods requirement. However, these courses will **not** count toward the 45 post-MA credits required for the degree. Therefore, if students use transferred courses from their MA program to fulfill the research requirement, they will have to complete additional courses to reach the 45 credit hour requirement.
 - (c) Courses within and outside of Communication Studies to establish specialization
3. 12 credits **minimum** of dissertation credits

Note: Completing 1-3 above results in 87 credit hours. The additional 3 credit hours needed to fulfill the 90 credit hour requirement can be completed as additional dissertation credits or with additional coursework. Please note that the Preparing Future Faculty Program (PFF, 3 credits) will not count as part of the 45 credits of coursework past the MA degree.

Department of Communication Studies
Comprehensive Exam Process
Adopted 12/6/17

The comprehensive exam process is designed to provide students the opportunity to articulate and demonstrate in writing and orals, mastery of and ability to articulate main arguments of the discipline, including students' emphasis area and research specialization. The exam is designed in such a way to create documents that students can use in other ways after the exams, for example, as part of dissertations, conference papers, and/or publications.

The exam process starts after completion of the Spring semester of the 2nd year. Students will be required to write three manuscript-length papers, each based on an exam question provided by the committee. The general focus of each paper is based on discussion and agreement with the student, advisor and supervisory committee prior to beginning the comprehensive exam process. Papers may include literature reviews, grant proposals, theoretical arguments, rhetorical criticisms, empirical reports, or substantial revisions to extant papers that meet demonstrate mastery and argument.

Preparation

Students will meet with their advisor and supervisory committee members in Spring semester prior to the summer that exams will start. Prior to the meeting and, in consultation with the advisor, the student should submit a brief statement to the supervisory committee (2-3 pages) about their research program and potential areas for comprehensive exams. These areas for comprehensive exams should be based on coursework, research focus, dissertation topic, and connections with scholarly expertise of committee members. During this meeting, the supervisory committee will decide on the general topic areas for the three papers and the faculty member charged with writing the question for the paper. Faculty not on the supervisory committee may be included as an examining committee member if they are involved in writing or assessing a question. Collectively, the topic for questions should reflect the student's primary theoretical, conceptual, and methodological foci and have a clear connection with the proposed dissertation topic. A pre-prospectus is no longer required by the department as part of this alternative format. However, it may be required by the advisor and/or supervisory committee.

Completing the Written Exam

A “start date” and timeline (i.e., dates for the 2nd and 3rd paper) should be submitted to the Director of Graduate Students prior to finals week of the Spring semester. The advisor will coordinate the process for sending the questions to the student on the appropriate date. Changes to the timeline can be made only by approval from the advisor and in consultation with the Supervisory committee. After the end of the Spring semester, but no later than June 15th, students request the first question. The paper for this question must be completed within three (3) weeks of being assigned. Upon completion, the manuscript is submitted to the advisor and director of graduate studies. Students may opt for a two (2) week break before the next paper question is provided. The same process should be followed for the second and third paper. Thus, the maximum time for completing comprehensive exams is thirteen (13) weeks.

Papers are provided to the committee upon completion of each paper. The examining committee will have, at minimum, two (2) weeks to review papers before providing approval (or other considerations) to move to oral examination. In addition to adequately addressing aspects of each question, papers should reflect university-level quality in writing. If necessary, students may be asked to revise papers before moving on to oral examination format. During the oral examination, discussion may center on the content of the manuscripts as well as general areas reflecting a student’s program of study.

Oral examinations will be scheduled following the completion of the third paper and upon approval by the examining committee. Upon successful completion of the oral exam, students will be advanced to candidacy by filling the signed form to Graduate Students), along with an updated program of studies, if needed (with a list of the changes). Candidacy forms are available here:

<https://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/degrees/doctoral#candidacy>

Students should not submit comprehensive exam manuscripts to journals, conferences, or other outlets until oral examinations have been successfully completed.